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How Saskatchewan Women Got the Vote

A brief history which every Saskatchewan woman should read



HON. W. R. MOTHERWELL

QUOTATIONS FROM SPEECHES MADE BY

Hon. W. R. Motherwell
AND OTHERS

ISSUED FROM THE CENTRAL OFFICE OF THE
PROVINCIAL LIBERAL PARTY



How Saskatchewan Women Got the Vote

The Saskatchewan election campaign is surely on if we are to judge by the amount of irresponsible Tory campaign literature that is floating around.

The Tory Opposition, hopeful of some measure of success a year ago, when they were busy slandering their Province and its Government, were driven out of their first-line trenches by the reports of the Royal Commissions on the Bradshaw charges. From their second-line trenches also (the Doherty Act delusion and the Willoughby water-wagon pretence with Frank Brunner as Chief Coachman) they have been driven by public sentiment and the unanimous representations of our temperance organisations and churches, and that before the fight has much more than started. Now, with the hope of averting total disaster, our friends, the enemy, have taken up their third-line position, which seems to be an accentuation of their former, and usually fallacious, tactics, supplemented by a determination to deceive the new electors—the women—as to how and by whom they secured their newly gotten franchise.

The Tories are modestly claiming that they are the real reformers in this matter, and that Premier Scott and his colleagues not only were driven reluctantly by them to take action, but were at the outset quite lukewarm towards the movement, if not actually opposed to it. This most absurd contention of the Opposition has gone the rounds of the Province from platform to platform, and is now appearing in their literature (see paid advertisement in Wolseley "News" during April last, as evidence of this).

It would scarcely be necessary to correct the astounding claims and charges that are being made in such advertisements and speeches were it not for the large body of new voters that have so recently been added to the Provincial electorate by its Legislature.

These new voters are anxious to know the facts so that they may vote intelligently, but have had little opportunity yet of knowing much of the peculiar ways of Saskatchewan's official Tory party and its decided tendency to deceive and even lie. Fortunately, there are some records for this important question and some evidence of just how woman's franchise was obtained and what has been the Liberal attitude towards this question from its inception.

Opposition Manoeuvres.

First of all, it will probably be advisable to refer briefly to party tactics and Opposition manoeuvres that occur in any and every Legislature. It is the duty and privilege of an Opposition, just as it is of a government, to anticipate public sentiment and public requirements. But an Opposition has always the greater freedom in agitating any new thing, as no responsibility for action devolves upon it—that being always the duty of the Government.

If, in the opinion of an Opposition, a government contemplated any action that would likely bring it public favour, it is looked upon as good Opposition tactics to move first by resolution or otherwise and thereby, as it is sometimes put, "steal the other fellow's 'clothes' or 'thunder'." A very good illustration of this may be found in the initial steps on behalf of the "cheaper money" movement for farmers. It will be recalled by many that when the Hon. George Langley (then a private member) was valiantly championing a cheaper money resolution before the annual Grain Growers' convention in March of 1912, in Regina, the Legislature being in session, Joe Wylie, M.L.A., quietly placed a similar resolution on the order paper, and thus stole a march on his Liberal opponent, Mr. Langley, so far as priority of movement in the Legislature was concerned.

In a similar manner, Mr. Bradshaw, in the fall session of 1912, knowing that the Saskatchewan Government was an admittedly progressive Government (both he and Mr. Tate used this as an argument for action, as will be noticed in press reports of House debates referred to further on) and likely to take action in the woman's franchise question before long in view of its growing interest in Manitoba and elsewhere, moved a resolution in the House in the following words:

"That in view of the progress made in other parts of the world in connection with the extension of the franchise to women, this House give earnest consideration to the subject with a view of placing the women of Saskatchewan on an equality with men."

Had the Opposition Leader been on his job when our former Premier, Mr. Scott, made his now famous speech at Oxbow in March, 1915, announcing to the world that his was going to be the first Government in Canada to abolish the retail sale of liquor by closing every bar in Saskatchewan on the following July 1st, he (Mr. Willoughby) might easily have forestalled the Premier by making a similar announcement earlier, or by his party adopting a resolution to that effect, as no responsibility for action devolved upon them. That Mr. Willoughby did not do so was probably due, at least in part, to the fact that he would be hitting his own hotel—the King George—credited with having the finest bar in the city of Moose Jaw. And so the game goes!

Legislative Record.

The House debate that occurred on the above quoted resolution of Mr. Bradshaw's showed a good natured unanimity of opinion on both sides in favour of the principle involved that does not always characterise party debates.

But as four and a half years have since gone by and our Opposition friends' memories as to what did occur seem to have since grown somewhat dim, it will be both fair and satisfactory to those in search of the truth to reproduce here both Regina party-press reports of this debate as the best substitute available for a Saskatchewan "Hansard."

The Regina "Province" (Conservative) report, under date of December 17, 1917, contained the following references:

"WOMAN SUFFRAGE IS WELL RECEIVED IN LEGISLATURE"

"The debate yesterday on woman suffrage was the best of the session and revealed a wealth of oratory and eloquence hitherto unsuspected in many members of the House.

"The scene in the House was unprecedented as member after member arose to laud to the skies, and beyond, the manifold inestimable virtues of the fairer and gentler sex.

"The days of chivalry are not dead—at least not in the Province of Saskatchewan. Woman is still given the same admiration, the same respect, and the same consideration that she was accorded from the knights of old. Such must be the conclusion after listening to yesterday's sitting of the Legislature. The question was not made a party one; women are considered on a plane above the strife and disturbance of present day partisan politics. The Government applauded the eulogies of the Opposition. The Opposition greeted the enthusiastic statements of the Government with equal warmth.

"The cause of women suffrage has been agitated for some years," stated Mr. Bradshaw, "and a review of the progress that has been made in the demand will not be out of place."

"I note the cause has been taken up in this country by various bodies and organisations. The Trades and Labour Congress of Saskatchewan have embodied it in their programme of requests to the Government. The Grain Growers' Guide, the recognised organ of the farmers, advocate strongly the extension of the franchise."

"The progress in the movement on the American continent, he went on, had been marked. Ten States representing a great

population had inaugurated a franchise for women, and the resulting conditions were eminently satisfactory.

“Mr. Motherwell, Minister of Agriculture, continued the discussion of woman suffrage. ‘The situation,’ he said, ‘was different from that in Great Britain, in the continental countries and again in New Zealand. In the latter country the women already have the franchise. In Great Britain there was an agitation unknown in Canada.’

“As soon as women made a united request to the authorities, the Minister of Agriculture felt sure that they would receive all consideration and respect. His impulse would prompt him to lend a sympathetic ear to the cause, even if brought forward at the present time; his judgment told him, however, that any legislation would be too premature. This was the only objection that he had to the resolution. Mr. Bradshaw would pluck the fruit before it was ripe, even before it was in the blossom.”

Surely there is no reluctance or lukewarmness shown by anyone in the above “Province” report. True, Premier Scott did not at this debate express himself on the subject, and he has since been adversely criticised for not doing so. But very severe illness necessitated his absence from Regina during that entire session or his voice would have been heard, as it was the following session, in entire sympathy with the movement.

The following extracts are taken from the Regina “Morning Leader” (Liberal) report of the same debate:

“LEGISLATORS FAVOUR VOTES FOR WOMEN.

“But Most of Them Consider Mr. Bradshaw’s Resolution Premature.

“LANGLEY’S STRONG SPEECH.

“Hon Geo. Langley Comes Out Strong For the Women’s Movement and Hon. W. R. Motherwell Speaks Sympathetically

—Members Generally Consider the Question
Not Acute in Saskatchewan.

“‘If the women of Saskatchewan seriously want the vote, by all means let them have it.’

“This was the tenor of the debate which commenced in the Legislature yesterday afternoon and continued during the evening on Mr. Bradshaw’s motion for an expression of ‘approval of the extension of the franchise to women.’ Indeed on the general

principle of the thing there was only one dissenting voice. But the prevailing sentiment seemed to be that to pass a resolution of this kind at the present time would be to perform a premature and injudicious act. As Hon. George Langley said, the mere discussion of the matter on the floor of the House indicated that Saskatchewan's legislators were alive to the importance of the movement.

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"We have the Grain Growers' Guide," said Mr. Bradshaw, "urging the extension of the franchise to women, to the same extent as it is enjoyed by men. So we have the producers and artisans favouring the movement, and we have the women themselves. True, it has not become very apparent here as yet, but the vote has already been extended to the women of ten States of the American Union. I think the success of the women in this respect on this continent has been due, to a great extent, to the fairmindedness of the men. The Saskatchewan Government has never lagged behind in the matter of initiating legislation, which, even though it may be new in principle, is calculated to be in the interests of the people. Consequently, I think that woman suffrage is a matter which this House might well take into its very serious consideration."

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"Hon. W. R. Motherwell said he did not propose to question, but rather to supplement the remarks of the member for Prince Albert. The extension of the franchise, as history would show, was a matter of evolution. Saskatchewan today might be said to enjoy a system of what was generally known as 'Manhood suffrage.'"

"The agitation for the extension of the franchise to women was more acute at the present time in Britain than in any other quarter of the globe. And it was surely 'not for nought.'"

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"In view of conditions in England," said Mr. Motherwell, "I verily believe that if I lived there I would be a supporter of the suffragette movement. But in Saskatchewan it seems to me that the women are sufficiently satisfied to set aside for the present any serious or unanimous desire for the vote. They endure no wrongs which are not removed under the present system. Woman's rights in Saskatchewan are by no means ignored at present. But I think the motion before the House is premature. I will say, though, that when the time arrives at which any

considerable number of women approach this Government urging the extension of the franchise to women, I will go so far as to say that their case will receive very favourable and just consideration at the hands of the Government.

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"I do not think the resolution of the honourable member for Prince Albert is premature," said Mr. Langley, "but I think it would be premature to take a division on it. The result of such a vote would be misleading."

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"I remember," said Mr. Langley, "when women commenced saying that they had as much right as men to mental development, and the men laughed at the idea. But women have fought their way through school and college, have held their own, and have in many cases outstripped the brightest of their male competitors. We have grudgingly admitted them to the professions, and they are demonstrating their ability to hold their own or better."

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"I do not agree with the statement that we should wait to grant women suffrage in Saskatchewan until the majority of women ask for it. When we have a fair minority asking for it, I think we will be justified in granting it to them."

Sufficient proof is contained in the foregoing press extracts to convince any impartial person that not only was the Government not forced against its inclinations by the Opposition to grant the franchise to women (as is being falsely alleged by the Tories) but that every member of the Government that spoke on the occasions in question was in hearty accord with it.

If there is any one man in the Territorial or Saskatchewan Legislatures on whose behalf the claim can be made that he led the woman's emancipation movement, it is the late Mr. Alex. Smith, former Liberal member for Moosomin, whose sympathetic activities in this respect dated back many years ago and before the present Saskatchewan Opposition were ever politically heard of.

Government Invited Women's Assistance.

Then again, from the following extracts of press reports of the debate in the Legislature in 1913, it will be noted that Premier Scott, present for the first time during such a discussion, practically invited the women to get busy and ask for the franchise, when they would find the Government ready and willing to play their part:

(Extract from Regina "Province," December 10, 1913.)

"LEGISLATURE IN FAVOUR OF GIVING VOTES TO WOMEN.

"Resolution Introduced by Mr. Bradshaw, of Prince Albert, Calling For Discussion of Important Legislation, Passed by Unanimous Vote Yesterday. Premier Scott Indorses Resolution, But Claims No Immediate Demand.

"With the influence of women voters eloquently extolled on every side, the Saskatchewan Legislature yesterday created a precedent by the passage of a resolution stating, 'That in the opinion of this House, the question of the extension of the franchise to women should receive the earnest consideration of the Assembly at the present session.'

"A final eloquent plea for earnest and fair consideration concluded the address of Mr. Bradshaw. 'The administration of Saskatchewan,' he said, 'will never regret granting women the right to exercise an influence which we all feel can be nothing but beneficial and elevating.'

"Mr. Tate, of Lumsden, seconded the resolution, and reiterated the argument that had been brought forward by Mr. Bradshaw, that there was a strong and general demand on the part of the women themselves for the extension of the franchise. Saskatchewan was, in many respects, recognised as an advanced province, and he hoped that in this regard the Government would also be the first to accede to the request.

"Hon. W. R. Motherwell, Minister of Agriculture, spoke rather fully on the question, pointing out the different countries and states where the franchise had been extended, and where the results were very beneficial. In the course of his speech, however, Mr. Motherwell declared that as far as he could see there was no general demand on the part of the women of the Province themselves.

"Premier Scott expressed his indorsement of the resolution, and of the manner in which it had been presented and seconded by Mr. Bradshaw and Mr. Tate. 'Speaking on behalf of the Government,' said Mr. Scott, 'I do not think that we would be justified in bringing about this comprehensive reform, unless there is a more concerted and more general demand by the women

of Saskatchewan. The position at the present time is very similar to that of the direct legislation question last year. If it had not been that both political parties made this latter question a plank in the election platform, it probably would have been also considered too premature.

"Personally I am entirely in favour of the movement, and I cannot see any reason why adult women are not qualified to cast a vote. I hope that the women of Saskatchewan will express a desire to have the franchise extended. Until that time, however, legislation would be untimely," he concluded.

Mr. Bradshaw, in closing the debate, strengthened the appeal, which he had so ably made in presenting the resolution.

"He appreciated the position of the Government that the matter should be given a more mature consideration, by the people and an opportunity given to present a more direct demand.

"The resolution was carried unanimously."

The Regina "Morning Leader," of December 10, 1913, contained the following references:

"LAWMAKERS UNANIMOUSLY IN FAVOUR OF VOTES FOR WOMEN."

"Resolution Carried by House Shows That Suffrage Will Be Granted As Soon As Demand Becomes Real—Premier Scott Declared Franchise Should Be Extended, But Women of Province Are Still Indifferent to Issue."

"Woman's suffrage and the growth of feminism commanded the attention of the Legislators of Saskatchewan for almost an hour this afternoon. There were no signs of suffragist agitation, no fair lobbyists to urge the claims of their sex. Rows of well-nigh empty benches in all the galleries testified to the indifference of the public to the issue.

"In moving the resolution, Mr. Bradshaw said the movement had gone far beyond the experimental stage. It had met with general support throughout the civilised world, and had resulted in a marked elevation in the standard of public life. The member went on to read letters which he had received in regard to the subject. The solution of the temperance problem, of the question of social evil, proposals for granting homesteads to women, and in many other ways advancing the interests of women, should all be matters for settlement in part by the women's vote, according to one of Mr. Bradshaw's correspondents.

"The press of the provinces and of the West as a whole, and the grain growers, were strongly in favour of the extension of the franchise. . . .

"The resolution was seconded by Mr. Tate (Conservative) who said that in the advanced character of the legislation which has been placed on its statute book, Saskatchewan leads the Dominion, and in some respects the North American continent. That this Province should be the first to enfranchise its women was altogether fitting. . . .

"Hon. W. R. Motherwell said that the question of the extension of the franchise was a question which had occupied the attention of the progressive countries of the world for more than a century. In many countries woman suffrage was already established. There could be no doubt as to the right of women to the franchise. The question was whether there was any real demand for the vote. The attitude of the public to direct legislation and the attitude of the women to the suffrage were in many respects comparable. Both were good in themselves, but the passage of either seemed premature. . . .

"Premier Favours Franchise.

"Heartily indorsing the opinions expressed by Mr. Bradshaw, Premier Scott said that, speaking in behalf of the Government, he did not think that the time was yet ripe for woman's suffrage. There had been no demand from any large body of women. As soon as such demand did arise, as soon as the women of Saskatchewan showed that they wanted the vote, they would get it. Prior to the last session of the House, when the first resolution bearing on the subject was before them, he had not heard it mentioned more than a dozen times during the six years of his public life in the Province.

"Within the past year, however, he had received many communications. From 2,000 to 2,500 women of Saskatchewan had signified their desire for the vote by petitioning the Government. Such a number, however, could not be considered as representative of the women of the Province as a whole. The Premier could see no reason why women should not vote as soon as they showed themselves ready to do so."

Tory Record Against Them.

Whoever heard of a stand-pat Conservative or Conservative party being the first to extend the franchise to women, or indeed to any other class of the community? History is against such an assumption.

"A Scrap of Paper."

So far there is no guarantee that the Tories, for all their talk, ever "meant business." They have talked woman suffrage off and on for a few years, but since their party has been in power at Ottawa, and could have given the vote to women they have done absolutely nothing at all. They talk about the Resolution they brought down in the Legislature, but that meant nothing to them—it may ultimately have proved nothing but the merest whitewash. They voted unanimously for a resolution in favour of Reciprocity a few years ago (1911), but have ever since strenuously opposed it. What guarantee is there that if they so suddenly changed their minds and attitude on such a big and important issue as Reciprocity they would not do likewise on the woman suffrage question? What guarantee is there that, like the Reciprocity Resolution, they would not treat the Woman's Franchise Resolution just as "a scrap of paper"? Tory association with resolutions in the past prove most conclusively that they value them just so long as it is in their interests to do so—and no longer.

Do not therefore be deceived by fair-sounding Tory talk. Always remember that the Liberals pleaded women's cause until the bounds of liberty were widened, by granting full voting powers to women as well as to men. And now the Liberal party is pledged to secure for women the Federal franchise which the Tory party do not feel disposed to grant.

It was only after the three Western Liberal Prairie Provinces had freely extended the franchise to women, and Saskatchewan had actually exercised it (December 11th last) that Conservative Ontario was last month induced to take the same stand. And the same priority and slow follow-up occurred on the temperance question.

Credit Due to Liberal Government.

Lest there should be any "Doubting Thomases" still left as to the Saskatchewan Liberal Government, and it alone, being responsible for granting the franchise to Saskatchewan women, as it is for all other progressive legislation passed during the past eleven years or more, I quote the following extracts from press reports of what Saskatchewan's representative women themselves said and to whom they said it, when they assembled on the floor of the Legislature in 1916 with their petitions asking for the franchise:

(From the "Morning Leader," February 15, 1916.)

"WOMEN RECEIVE THE VOTE FROM SCOTT GOVERNMENT AT MEMORABLE ST. VALENTINE'S DAY ASSEMBLY.

"Petitions and Addresses Rewarded Promptly and Decisively.

"THIS IS SO SUDDEN, SIR."

**"President of Provincial Equal Franchise Board Voices Thanks
of Women.**

"Mrs. Lawton, the slender and gentle, but very alert woman who is at the head of the Provincial Equal Suffrage board, having addressed the Premier and the House, said:

"Mr. Premier, we have reason to be grateful to you for much of the recent legislation you have enacted. Already many have benefited by The Homestead Act, and have felt the value of its protection. Your temperance legislation we have followed closely. Today we ask for the women of the Province the chance to record their votes with the men's.

"We have to congratulate Manitoba upon being the first province to grant equal suffrage. I feel safe in saying that we shall come second. We feel confident that our Government is just as progressive as Manitoba's, and that only the incident of their house sitting a few weeks before ours, gave them the lead. As this is to be the last time I shall be on such a deputation, I may express my gratefulness for the courteous treatment received on both occasions from the Premier and his associates. The women of Saskatchewan are grateful for the kindly treatment given by this legislature."

Premier Scott Extends Franchise.

"I have today," said Mr. Scott, "the unique experience of being able to give a definite answer to a deputation. It is not often that I am in a position to do that after hearing a deputation, but in this particular instance I am able to give an answer at once. I am acquainted with the views of the Legislature in this particular matter and I am able to say that we have arrived at the decision that the time has come when the change for which you ask in your appeal should be made."

"At this point, the delegation broke into enthusiastic applause which lasted for some few seconds."

(From the "Daily Province," February 14, 1916.)

"I have today the unique experience in regard to petitions and delegations of being able to give a definite answer. It is not often that after listening to a delegation that it is possible for me to say yes or no. I am acquainted with the views of the Legislature, and therefore able to say that we have arrived at the decision that the time has come for the change for which you ask in your appeal. . . . What I commit this Government to do before the close of this session, change our franchise law to make it an equal right and privilege and responsibility to every adult in the Province on the same terms, will have its effect on Canada, and will likely have a more far-reaching effect than that."—Premier Scott

"The substance of the Premier's reply is quoted above. He said in addition, that while the Manitoba women had been first in Western Canada to receive the vote at the hands of the Legislature, the Saskatchewan general elections would come before those in Manitoba, and he hoped, therefore, that the Saskatchewan women would be able to exercise their franchise rights before the women of any other province in the Dominion."

"Mrs. Lawton's Reply to Premier.

"Mr. Premier, this is so sudden."

"This was the first expression of acceptance voiced by the president of the Provincial Equal Franchise League, after the ballot had been offered in so rare and eloquent a manner."

Conclusions.

From the above party newspaper extracts, both of which agree in substance, the following points may be noted:

- (1) That the justice of woman's franchise was unquestionable and not a matter for debate;
- (2) That the discussion was nonpartisan and the decision unanimous;
- (3) That while the time was not yet ripe for legislative action, it was coming rapidly;

- (4) That the two Opposition members who moved and seconded the resolution (Messrs. Bradshaw and Tate) both expressed themselves as fully expecting a progressive Government like Saskatchewan's to lead in this reform, as it had done in so many others;
- (5) That there was no ground for charging any of the speakers with undue levity, disrespect or lukewarmness towards this important movement;
- (6) That Premier Scott was so entirely whole-hearted in the matter that his quick decision took the women quite by surprise;
- (7) That the women leaders of the various women's organisations who presented their case to the Premier and his colleagues were equally whole-hearted and appreciative in acknowledging the new rights and responsibilities that they had so recently, so quickly and so easily acquired.

Liberals Again Favour Women.

What is to many women an even more important consideration than the receipt of the Provincial franchise, was the change in the municipal laws during the session of 1917, at which time every husband's property qualifying him to vote at a school or municipal election, also automatically and similarly qualified his wife as joint owner of said property. This step, when taken, went further than any other province in Canada had gone, thereby retaining the lead to Saskatchewan in this, as in other reforms.

Mrs. Nellie McClung.

If there is any one western woman who can be credited with leading in the woman's suffrage movement, it is Mrs. Nellie McClung. Writing early this year she said:

"To Saskatchewan belongs the proud distinction of being the first province of the West, and second in the Dominion to settle the liquor question (on which our women voted); and in this matter has earned the gratitude of all lovers of humanity. The bold stand taken by Saskatchewan's Government, in the first year of the war, when they took their political lives in their hand by outlawing the bar-room, paved the way for this reform in the other provinces.

"Because woman suffrage came easily, it is in danger of being held in light esteem. A few women worked hard, a num-

"ber worked a little, the great majority did nothing, but many
"of the latter class are keenly alive to their duties now, and
"under the stimulating power of the vote, are measuring up to
"the responsibility of citizenship."

It will be noted that Mrs. McClung expresses the view that our women got the vote "easily," proved by the fact that the great majority of them were indifferent to the franchise. This justifies the attitude of our Government in waiting for an expression of a desire for the vote from the women before definitely granting it.

What the Women Themselves Say.

The following resolution was drafted, written, and presented by women delegates at the grand Liberal convention held at Moose Jaw in March, and was most enthusiastically received. It speaks for itself.

"That this Convention, in which women for the first time participate on equal terms with men, express unqualified appreciation of ex-Premier Scott and his colleagues in causing to be made law two measures for which women have long worked and prayed—firstly, the overthrow of the legalised liquor traffic; secondly, the granting of the franchise to women, the chief value of which, in our view, consists in the fact that having in our hands the privilege and power of the ballot, assurance is made doubly sure that the threatening, blighting curse of alcoholism will never have legal sanction in our fair province again."

Tory Retreat

When the above facts become fully known, the Opposition's third line of trenches will rapidly assume as battered a condition as their first two. Driven then to retreat, there is nothing left for them to do but fall back on their "Hindenburg line," which consists of a deliberate and grossly un-British attempt to stir up race hatred and prejudice in this Province at the very time when patience and fair dealing is most urgently desired.

